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TWO OF PERCY'S PLAYS AS PROOF OF THE ELIZABETHAN STAGE

During the last few years two plays of William Percy, *The Cuckqueans and Cuckolds Errants* and the *Faery Pastoral*, have played an important part in most of the extended studies of the Shaksperian stage and staging. Mr. G. F. Reynolds, especially, has been constantly citing them and quoting long extracts from their stage directions in his studies of the Elizabethan stage.¹ He considers them of "great value" because they have been "made from the author's manuscript uninfluenced by stage performance." But an author's MS, though direct from his hand as Percy's is, is not all we have to consider; an examination of the construction and purpose of the plays in question must first be made before any of the stage directions can be safely used in a study of the Elizabethan stage.

The history of Percy's MS will be conveniently found in Schelling's *The Elizabethan Drama*.² William Percy during his lifetime (1573-1648) wrote in his own hand in a folio volume six plays. According to Fleay, the plays were written from 1601 to 1603.³ The volume was never published and no duplicates or actors' copies are known to exist. There is, indeed, no positive evidence that the plays were ever acted. The MS found its way into the Duke of Roxburghe's

¹ "Some Principles of Elizabethan Staging," *Modern Philology*, April and June, 1905; and "What We Know of the Elizabethan Stage," *ibid.*, July, 1911. See also Carl Grabau, "Zur englischen Bühne um 1600," *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, 1902; G. P. Baker, *The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist*; F. E. Schelling, *The Elizabethan Drama*. C. W. Wallace in *The Children of the Chapel at Blackfriars, 1597-1603* offers a brief protest against these plays: "But there is no evidence that *The Faery Pastoral* or any other play in the MS volume by Percy was ever acted by any company. His works doubtless belong to that numerous host [cf. Collier, *History of Dramatic Poetry and Annals of the English Stage*, III, 231-32] that, for unsuitableness or other reasons, never trod the boards. Hence I set no special value upon the elaborate and impossible stage-directions or other items taken seriously by many as touching vital points in stage-history." In my own study, *The Shaksperian Stage*, for want of space and time for a full discussion I set them aside with the single statement that they "were not written to be played according to the regular methods of staging, and must therefore be barred in a study of principles of Elizabethan staging." The plays were, of course, referred to in connection with the stage long ago. Collier calls attention to them in his discussion of the Elizabethan stage, *op. cit.*, III, 163.

² Vol. I, 464-65.

³ *Chronicle History of the English Drama*, II, 162.

library in 1796, and in 1824 two of the plays, *The Cuckqueans and Cuckolds Errants* and the *Faery Pastoral*, were published by Joseph Halsewood for the Roxburghe Club. The other four plays still remain unpublished. Owing to this condition of publication, only *Cuckqueans and Cuckolds Errants* and the *Faery Pastoral* are widely known or have been used to any extent in studies on the stage. It is therefore with these two dramas that we are concerned in this essay. As the two plays are somewhat different, the staging will be more clearly understood by examining each play separately.

I. CUCKQUEANS AND CUCKOLDS ERRANTS

As the title suggests, the theme of *Cuckqueans and Cuckolds Errants* is cuckoldry. Two Oxford students, after a year of independent travel abroad, return to England. They do not, however, go at once to their homes, but each by chance meets and falls in love with the other's wife. Circumstances eventually calling them to their own homes, they find that their wives have been untrue to them, and immediately desert them. The two forsaken women start out from their respective homes, but fortunately meet and continue to wander about the country together, coming finally at nightfall to the Tarlton Inn. The two students, in the meantime, have likewise fortunately met in a forester's lodge, where they at once become very good friends with the forester's wife. Therefore exit forester. The students now decide to become soldiers, with the forester's wife as their captain. About midnight the three come to the Tarlton Inn where they find the forester in too friendly relation with the deserted wives. A great hubbub ensues, which finally ends in a beautiful reconciliation of the cuckqueans and cuckolds and a vow to live chaste lives ever afterward. The sub-plot gives the adventures of two lifts, street gamins, who, together with an innkeeper, rob a lawyer of his famous drinking-bowl, and thereby set the lawyer and his wife at fisticuffs with each other.

The theme, therefore, impossible and scandalous as it is, offers nothing very unusual in the Elizabethan drama. But here all relationship with that drama ends. The style, form, and method of staging the play show no connection with the regular London playhouses.

In the first place, the style indicates that it was written without any knowledge of, or at least respect to, the pit-gallery London audience. Latin words, phrases, and sentences are lavishly scattered through it. Fifteen of the characters speak Latin with perfect ease and understanding. The lawyer, the students, and the two ladies might use a foreign expression occasionally without calling forth comment; but when ghosts, soldiers, tradesmen, servants, maids, inn-keepers, and street gamins all use perfect Latin with equal fluency, there must be something very limited in the author's knowledge of the English people, and in the audience for which he writes.

The regular Elizabethan dramatists used an occasional Latin phrase in their plays, but with a purpose—for a joke, for characterization, etc. In this play the Latin, in most cases, serves no end, except to air the writer's knowledge of the classics. Here are a few illustrations:

Shift [street gamin]: Myne Host Pigot, what needed this stirr? *Quod defertur non aufertur*, thou shalt haue it all, before night, I assure thee, Man.

Pig. [innkeeper]: *Qui non est hodie cras minus aptus erit.*

Flo. [to his wife]: I can no longer hold, Therefore t' outface
The shamles Impudency, loe, strumpet,
What I haue found, among thy boxes, late.

Raf. [Floridan's servant, aside]: *Victus, y faith victus, victa, victum.*

Perl. Mr. Capitaines, wee do beseech your worships both, you would but vouchsafe us your worships eares both, *Sedibus haec imis, Res est non parua locetis.*

Other evidences of misappropriated learning may be pointed out: Rafe, a servant, advises his mistress to bear her cross with more than "Grisilaean Magnanimity." Janekin, waiting woman to Arvania, speaks of "Artemidorus of dreames." The Goldsmith says, "as Chaucer verie adaptly hath applied it." The innkeeper calls the two street gamins "honest Homers." The Goldsmith remarks to Pearle who has been using some Latin phrases: "Not too deepe, I pray you yet, least your worship chaunce be choakt with a grape as was once your Authour." The Goldsmith must have been an exceptionally learned tradesman to be able not only to recognize the

Latin author from the few lines quoted, but to know that that author once choked on a grape. All have mythology at their tongue's end. Tradesmen, servants, and shop lifts use mythological terms as freely as the lawyer and the students. Indeed the whole dialogue is such as one might expect to find in a crowd of Oxford students, where phrases of Latin and learned expressions are freely mixed with much smutty talk, humorous and intelligible to them but wholly unhumorous and unintelligible to the rank and file of a London audience. Certainly this dialogue was not meant to split the ears of the groundlings.

Another evidence of this play's aloofness from the regular Elizabethan drama is its careful division into acts and scenes according to the method of Plautus and Terence. Every time a character enters or leaves the stage, a new scene is marked in the text. Forty-one scenes in all are thus listed. Most of the scenes open without stating "Enter so and so," except for an occasional marginal note, but simply with a list of the *dramatis personae* for the scene, and close without any exit for the characters. In the monologues, in the true Terentian fashion, a character may speak directly to the audience, telling them what he has done or is about to do: Pearle says on leaving the stage: "But viah, as very well sayeth that the dusty Prouerbe, Forewarnd forearmd, and therefore, for to Jogge it furth my worshipfull hed, before it settle, I will, presently, in, to Market, and see there, what sweet Fish there is, for dinner, now to be had. So a good god morrowe, vnto you all now, Gentlemen, the whiles." Later on in the play Wright says on entering the stage alone: "Loe you all, honest Gentlemen, I haue ended, here, his Bolle for him, yet notwithstanding, I dare auouch, for him that a foolisher gawde hath neuer, yet, beene aduised, nay nor, yet, deuised, by any hath, in him, a reasonable soule to be saued by. Thus may good stuff be abused, you see, if it fall into a Fooles hand."

Lastly, the play is staged distinctly in the manner of a Plautan comedy and not of a Shaksperian. The opening directions are: "Harwich, In Midde of the Stage Colchester with Image of Tarlton, Signe and Ghirlond under him also. The Raungers Lodge, Maldon, A Ladder of Roapes trussd up neare Harwich. Highest and aloft the Title THE CUCK-QUEANES AND CUCKOLDS ERRANTS. A

Long Fourme."¹ Here we have the usual Latin stage—a street or open space before two or more houses, doors, or places. On the right is the home of Floridan in Harwich, on the left that of Claribel in Maldon; in the center rear is the Tarlton Inn in Colchester, with the home of Pearle on the left and the forester's lodge on the right. Before the inn door, or before any of the doors, stands the "fourme," or bench.²

The scene never changes throughout the play. All the visible action takes place on this neutral ground or at the doors of the various houses. Whatever takes place in the interior of the houses is reported by the noise that is made or by the characters who kindly come out and discuss the indoor action for the benefit of the audience. The characters come and go freely by the streets or by the doors as the situation may demand. They happen to be passing over this open space, or come to and from their homes, or appear before the doors and call the inmates out. Here is a fair example of the method: The lawyer, accompanied by the goldsmith, brings two of his friends to his home to show them his marvelous wine-bowl. The two street

¹ The towns in this theatrical world are, of course, brought into closer relation than in real life. Some students have supposed that there were sign boards over the doors, stating that the one side was Harwich, the other Maldon, and the rear Colchester, but there is absolutely no mention of them in the directions or text and no need of them on the stage to make the action clear.

² Mr. Reynolds, in "Some Principles of Elizabethan Staging," *Modern Philology*, April, 1905, explains the use of the bench as follows: "The rear stage seems to have represented [the inn], for in Act V two maids in this inn sit on the 'long fourme' and tell each other dreams." He does not understand the situation at all. And this is the case with many of his explanations of situations in Elizabethan plays. He is a very careful, conscientious worker and deserves much credit for his efforts, but he lacks perspective—he cannot see the wood for the trees. An understanding of the general custom of play-writing and play-production in Shakspeare's time must first be understood before a single stage direction can be safely used to prove one's theories. Moreover, the Elizabethan stage must be studied in the light of the complete development of the English stage and of its relation to the stages of other countries. These matters need not enter the discussion itself, but the student must hold them in perspective. Apparently Mr. Reynolds began his work with the ideas of his early school days firmly fixed in his mind, days when the Elizabethan stage was considered a crude, incongruous, laughable affair. Instead of throwing aside these misconceptions and investigating the question broadly with a free, unbiased mind, he proceeded to search out from the remote corners of the Elizabethan drama as many crude, incongruous situations as he could find. And with a handful of such cases—many wrongly understood, as the above instance—he confirmed his ideas. He terms himself an ancientist as opposed to the other workers on the subject whom he calls modernists. This nomenclature is perhaps not inappropriate, providing it is understood that his ancientness goes back only to the last century when the Elizabethan stage and staging were merely guessed at and not made the object of special research.

thieves and the innkeeper "stand close." The lawyer approaches his door and calls out:

Perl: Hoa, Christian, Hoa.

ACT III, SC. 6

Christian Sanders Pearle Wright Periman Nim Shift Pigot
Christ.: Here, forsooth, Husband.

This method of staging is Latin, but emphatically not English. The body of regular Elizabethan plays demands an entirely different arrangement of the stage. The different scenes in an Elizabethan play may be a wood, a street, a bedroom, a hall, a battle-field, etc., each in an entirely different location. The scenes are constantly changing. The stage is now a presence chamber of the king, now a battle-field, now a wood, now a street, and so on. Anyone who is familiar with the Elizabethan drama and the Latin drama knows that the stages for the two are entirely different.

To conclude with this play, the style, the form, and the method of staging of *Cuckqueans and Cuckolds Errants* show that the author had in mind not the Elizabethan stage but the Latin stage. The plays of Plautus and Terence were read, studied, and played at the schools and universities. These the students naturally imitated in writing plays, and not until they became part of the whirl of the great London drama did they lay aside their textbooks. This Percy did not do in *Cuckqueans and Cuckolds Errants*. Therefore, one may as well quote directions from Plautus and Terence to prove his theories of the Shaksperian stage as from this play.

II. FAERY PASTORAL

The Faery Pastoral seems to be a pedant's attempt at a Latinized play for court. The plot is very slight. In fact, the play consists of a number of plots connected by little more than the faeryland setting. Oberon and Chloris, king and queen of the faeries, appear once on the stage and have their dispute as to whose is the greater love, a man's or a woman's, settled by Tyresias, the blind prophet of Thebes, who is led by Mercury. Prince Orion, having been appointed by Oberon to supersede Princess Hypsiphyle as protector of Elvida, contests in a hunting-match with the Princess for the forest and her

hand in marriage. Three faery huntsmen are in love with three faery huntresses. At first the men are duped by the women; one is put in a well, another is persuaded to enter a hollow oak tree that is full of bees, and the third swoons from long chasing through the forest after the elusive sound of his mistress' horn. To even up matters, the women are in turn tricked by the men; one is put in a hot kiln, another in a fawn's stable, and the third is made owlet-eyed by gazing at the sun too long. Christophel, a keeper of the forest, idles away his time with two faery pages, ostensibly trying to change himself from a "Gore-belly Daemon" to an elf. A schoolmaster makes himself the laughing-stock of some faery children by trying to teach them Latin and incidentally a good deal of vulgarity. Oberon and Chloris settle their trouble at their first and only appearance. The prince and princess reappear at the end to celebrate their nuptials, and to reconcile the hunters and huntresses to each other and to the fate of marriage.

Thus with this slight plot, the interest, such as it is, must rely strongly on the setting. And this we find to be true. At the opening the following directions are given:

Highest, aloft, and on the Top of the Musick Tree the Title THE FAERY PASTORALL, Beneath him pind on Post of the Tree The Scene ELUIDA FORREST. Lowest off all ouer the Canopie NAIHAIITBOΔAION or FAERY CHAPPELL. A kiln of Brick. A Fowen Cott. A Hollowe Oake with vice of wood to shutt to. A Lowe well with Roape and Pullye. A Fourme of Turues. A Greene Bank being Pillowe to the Hed but. Lastly A Hole to creepe in and out.

Here we have a rather elaborate faeryland setting. Under the high trees are a faery chapel, a fawn's shelter, and a kiln, somewhere among which are a well and a long turf bench with a green bank at one end. All these stand reasonably well together in a setting for a faery play. No change takes place through the entire play, except at the end where the chapel is opened and closed. All the action takes place on this one setting. One group of faeries and foresters appear and strut and fret their hour upon the stage and pass off for another group. At the close the majority of the characters assemble here for the "Catastrophe of the Comœdy," as Percy says.

Orion with a Letter reading, Hypsiphyle Learchus Picus Hippolon Florida Camilla Fancia Atys Hylas Christophel, The Six Hunstmen Men and Women bearing on either syde a Banquet of diuers and sundry sorts of Junkets in goodly Gold and Syluer Bolles, Syluius and Syluia on either syde of them with Two venice Mazers or standing Bolles of glasse, The one with a Fragrant Malmsey, the other with Spanish Sack. Orion and Hypsiphyle in their wedding ornaments. Orion takes his Bride by the hand, then speakes as followes.

After his speech:

Here Atys, the Princes hauing seated themselves, stepping betweene the Two Chorus sayd the Apologie following with one Accord of the rest to the Princes in manner and forme following.

When the apologue is ended:

Here Syluis ane Syluia, stepping up the degrees, after had set the venice glasses or Mazers on either syde the Princes, The Sack by Hypsiphyle and the Malmeseye by Orion, Then holding the Imperiall Ghirlond, that hung ouer the Front of the Chapell, ouer both their heds, And than setting him alone on the heade of Orion, The whole Chorus of Huntsmen men and women Saluted his Maiesty all with one Accord.

This is evidently not the staging for a regular Shaksperian play—one scene as opposed to many. Compare it, for example, with *Hamlet*, a typical Elizabethan play. The stage at one time is a parapet, at another the presence chamber of the King, at another a hall in the palace arranged for a play, at another the Queen's closet, at another a graveyard, and so on. How far removed this is from the setting of the *Faery Pastoral* where all is one scene which never changes from the beginning to the end! Plainly Percy's play has no connection with the regular stage. Its setting resembles mainly that of a court production, and doubtless the possibilities of a court stage were uppermost in the author's mind in writing his play.

Its remoteness to the regular Elizabethan stage is further shown by its style. Latin words, phrases, and sentences abound. More than a dozen of the characters are conversant with Latin, from the king and queen, prince and princess, down to the faery pages, and the gore-belly keeper. Mythology they know, perhaps, by right, for they are faeries and mythological beings themselves. All are remarkably familiar with the classics. The keeper says: "Yet

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Plinie an Assured Truth-Teller alloweth in Birds Quadruplicity of them." David says: "For it was Ciceroes own Inuention (as Mr. Acham sayes)." Picus says: "Nay, I think Camilla's extract from line of that Camilla in greate Virgil told."

And still further, this play's divergence from the regular Elizabethan plays is shown by its form. Every entrance and every exit is, in the regular Latin manner, marked by a new scene. Thus there are thirty-two scenes in the play. No exits are given, and many of the scenes open simply with a list of the characters. The entire action takes place in one day and on one setting. Terence's plays are twice referred to, once in the Prologue, and once in Act II, Scene ii.

Therefore, the setting, style, and form of the *Faery Pastoral* show clearly that this faery story was not written with the regular Elizabethan stage in mind. It is an attempted Court play written by a student rhymers with Plautus on his right hand and Terence on his left, and with a bookcase filled with well-worn classics near him. The Prologue was written for the Court and "An alteration" was appended "Thus for Some or For Powles whither the better." That he hoped his play might be given at Court and at St. Paul's School is evident, but that it was ever played anywhere is extremely doubtful. Indeed his ambitions for his play were unbounded; in the opening directions he says: "Now if so be that the Properties of any These, that be outward, will not serue the turne by reason of concourse of the People on the Stage, Then you may omitt the sayd Properties which be outward and supplye their Places with their Nuncupations onely in Text Letters." Anyone who reads this play will doubtless think, as I do, that this change was never called for. What Percy needed was some knowledge of dramaturgy and the English stage. If he had laid aside his classics and his scribbling and attended the Globe where Burbage was giving the first performances of *Hamlet*, he *might* have written a piece that would have at least some resemblance to an Elizabethan play.

In conclusion, the directions in *Cuckqueans and Cuckolds Errants* and the *Faery Pastoral* are not "curious," and not "strange," and not even "interesting" when one once understands the nature of the plays. The only "strange" and "curious" thing is that professed

students of the English drama should fail to see that *Cuckolds Errants* and the *Faery Pastoral* have no connection whatever with the regular Elizabethan stage. And the only "interesting" thing is the light—or shadow—that is thrown on the studies of those who use these plays to prove their theories of Shaksperian staging.

VICTOR E. ALBRIGHT

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN